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SUBJECT: Probable Communist Reactions to a Particular US Course of Action

THE PROBLEM

How would North Vietnam, Communist China, and the USSR react to reconnaissance over China and North Vietnam by OXCART vehicles based in Okinawa?

1. China. We believe that the Chinese would quickly acquire knowledge of the operation. Mission aircraft would almost certainly be detected by Chinese radar, and, by virtue of speed and altitude, be identified as a new type of reconnaissance vehicle. The chances are good that Chinese agents on Okinawa would become aware of the operation and that Peiping would quickly relate the new overflights to the base at Kadena.

2. The Chinese would of course try to knock down the aircraft. Assuming their failure to do so, and a successful flight, we believe the chances of significantly adverse consequences to the US are virtually negligible. For the reasons that they do not acknowledge successful U-2 overflights, they would almost certainly

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not draw any special attention to this operation. Furthermore, in this contingency the kind of pressure they might try to apply to Japan or to any other country which might have afforded assistance would be of the most general sort -- if any at all.

3. The situation would be quite different, of course, if an OXCART aircraft came down on Chinese territory. Such an incident would be the occasion for a major political and propaganda campaign, particularly if a live American pilot fell into Chinese hands. In dramatizing the affair, Peiping would hope to persuade the world, including the American public, of Chinese strength and of the riskiness of US policy. They would also use what resources they had to mobilize public opinion in Japan and in Okinawa against US control of the latter island and against the existence of US bases in Japan itself.

4. In the past several years Communist China's air space has been probed often -- a number of deep penetrations by U-2s and drones, many shallow penetrations by other aircraft, and innumerable snooper patrols offshore by aircraft collecting Elint and oblique photography. The OXCART would seem "more of the same," only executed with superior equipment. The relative invulnerability of the craft

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would be frustrating to the Chinese, but the advanced technology which had made it possible would impress them and remind them of the capabilities the US could bring to bear in a Sino-US war.

5. The Chinese leaders probably do not seriously expect a US attack on China in the near future, i.e., as long as Chinese participation is indirect and Chinese airfields and Air Force units are not actively engaged in combat against US forces. Nevertheless, upon detecting the first OXCART intrusion they might worry that some sort of sneak attack was aimed at one of their nuclear installations, but they would not have time for any reaction other than to alert their air defenses to try to shoot it down. After the first flight was completed it would be clear that the mission was reconnaissance and that the OXCART was, in effect, merely a more advanced sort of U-2. We do not believe that the Chinese leaders are so tense and jittery that this would lead them to any drastic new action.

6. In a worst case situation -- one in which an OXCART vehicle ~~is~~ came to earth relatively intact, with the pilot alive and talking -- the regime's exploitation of a "captured American invader" would probably generate ~~it~~ high feeling within the country.

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The occasion could be used to "justify" some change in policy toward the Vietnam war which had already been decided upon, but we do not believe that even this worst case would, of itself, generate a significant policy change.

7. In short, we do not believe that OXCART missions, whether or not any aircraft came down inside China, would significantly affect Peiping's broader calculations governing its policy toward the war in Vietnam.

8. North Vietnam. The DRV is already subjected to heavy US air attack and reconnaissance. It would attach little extra significance to the OXCART operation.

9. The USSR. Through a variety of its own sources

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the Soviets would quickly acquire a fairly complete picture of the operation. They would probably take no action and make no representations on the matter. Moscow would reinforce any Chinese or North Vietnamese propaganda campaigns built around the shoot-down of an aircraft. But almost certainly they would not make

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overflights of China or the DRV a major issue in Soviet-US relations. Their primary concern would be to forestall use of the aircraft over their own territory. To this end they would probably issue propaganda recalling the inglorious end of the U-2 program over the USSR, and warning of the dangers of retribution against cooperating countries. They might further make private communications to the US stressing the seriousness with which they would view any intrusion into Soviet airspace.

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